



# THE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

2002

## THE SCHOOL PORTFOLIO IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

### Common Threads

This year marks the beginning of the implementation of the School Portfolio by four more school districts that have partnered with The Leadership Academy, Southwestern Bell, and Education for the Future Initiative. Two of the districts have implemented the process district wide while the other two have implemented it only in one building. These schools districts reach over 6100 students and 440 educators through the School Portfolio Implementation Process.

When gathering information, several themes began to emerge. While the school districts and buildings are diverse, many similarities are apparent. Some of the common threads observed include the following:

- The process is a structured, organized way to frame school improvement efforts.
- The school improvement continuums give specific self-assessment areas for collecting and analyzing perceptual data.
- Both building and district educators develop a dual focus on school improvement and student achievement throughout the process.
- The process encompasses and complements other school improvement efforts and initiatives.
- Teacher dialogue and teacher collaboration increase and become more focused.
- Leadership is shared at all levels.
- The process presents a starting point for looking at data.
- Educators are able to decide what data are important
- Data analysis allows teachers to adjust instructional strategies.
- Baseline data allows educators to assess where they are and move forward with purpose and direction.
- The process fosters establishing measurable goals.
- Data based decision making is promoted.
- The process itself is an ongoing, continuous improvement tool.

As you read the following overviews of the School Portfolio Process from the three Missouri school districts, please look for these common threads. The district and building scenarios are different; yet, they are the same in regard to the School Portfolio Implementation Process. Here are their stories to date:

# Bolivar

Some buildings in the Bolivar School District began using the School Portfolio process in the 2000-2001 school year.

While some districts chose to modify the School Portfolio, this was not necessary for Bolivar educators. The process proved to be very user friendly. The only real modification was in the way data was viewed and used in the district.

According to Mr. Zanatta, Assistant Superintendent, the School Portfolio was a good way to organize data and produce one piece of documentation. The organizing of data changed in the Bolivar district, making data easier to view and find. The School Portfolio has forced use of more data in Bolivar school buildings and has caused much modification in the way data is analyzed. With this focus on data better decisions are being made that impact teaching and learning.

According to Mr. Zanatta, another strength of the School Portfolio is public relations. He explains that when parents are considering moving into the Bolivar district and want to know about the district, the portfolio process is a good way to “showcase” the district.

The School Portfolio process has been “worthwhile” and a great way to get the staff focused on strengths, says Mr. Zanatta. He called the process a “confidence builder” for the staff.

## Putnam Co. R-I

Nancy Steele was first introduced to Victoria Bernhardt and the School Portfolio through the DESE Leadership Academy in 2000. At that time, Mrs. Steele believed that the process would help serve the high school needs in light of the portfolio process providing a means of measuring data in a school.

Mrs. Steele began awareness sessions with the high school staff and elementary staff members began reviewing the portfolio continuums and evaluating their school in their efforts toward school improvement. Some of the language in the School Improvement Continuums was new to them and time was spent on learning the terminology, which helped them a better understanding of the continuums through a common vocabulary. There were discussions on what data needed to be collected that was not already available. Clear Access data was used to determine if they were meeting the needs of the students. Staff implementation began this year in the high school.

One of the positives about the School Portfolio seen at the high school was the interdependence of its pieces and their parts in helping the staff make data-driven decisions. Although the teachers were receptive, Mrs. Steele helped facilitate the process so that the teachers would not be overwhelmed. Teachers volunteered for various committees and Mrs. Steele helped in pulling together artifact evidence needed for the School Improvement Continuums.

Staff found that some of the paperwork did not apply well to the Putnam County situation; therefore, some of the paper work was modified and some was eliminated to meet the local needs. Teachers were given three-ring binders in which to keep the School Portfolio materials, allowing them the opportunity to review progress over time. Staff anticipates that the portfolio approach will increase student achievement, planning, professional development, partnerships, etc. from year to year.

There is support from the central office as the superintendent attends regular consortium meetings of schools that are implementing the School Portfolio. Darl Davis, Truman State University Regional Professional Development Center Director, facilitates the consortium of six school districts that have the opportunity to receive help in handling information through a program called Tetra Data at the Northeast RPDC.

Mrs. Steele relates that while the staff was reviewing five years of student data previously, working on MAP Scores and subsequently planning instruction, the School Portfolio has provided a cohesive structure for good queries as well as data analysis. The portfolio is seen as a “road map” to school improvement, providing tools which can help the building’s educators proceed on their journeys. Although only the high school is implementing the process currently, Mrs. Steele expects that other buildings in the district will notice the process at the structure for good queries as well as data analysis. The portfolio is seen as a “road map” to school improvement, providing tools that can help build the school improvement.

# Republic

In the late spring and early summer of 2001, Dr. Pam Hedgepath began to be aware of the School Portfolio Process. She knew that the district needed to do more with data analysis; previous work with data had produced “hunches” instead of valuable concrete data evidence. The district’s programs were evaluated via data but bigger issues were not evaluated. Dr. Hedgepath saw the School Portfolio as a bridge to the CSIP and data collection for it, which was already in place. She knew that the portfolio process was based on solid research, the best of which had been gleaned for the model.

Principal study groups were started with one chapter of *The School Portfolio* by Dr. Victoria Bernhardt was read and discussed each month. The discussions included where the buildings were on the continuums and the establishment of baselines. It was believed that using the continuum to measure the district was a good step in making improvements. Previously, a good job had been done with student data perceptually but the School Portfolio gave actual data. Through the continuums the buildings could gauge where they needed to focus in professional development and program areas. The six building principals and special education director used the School Portfolio as a way to approach school improvement.

While the portfolio process has not caused Republic educators to look at data much differently, it has caused connections to be made between/among data while looking at two or three variables at the same time. Through a focus on cohort groups of students (from the SAT 9) educators noticed interesting things between disaggregated groups: in grades 3 – 10: boys outscore girls in science, i.e.

Dr. Hedgepath believes that the use of the School Portfolio has caused building School Improvement Plans to be stronger this year. Also, teachers have been involved in developing the building plans and have gained “ownership” of them. In addition, educators are involved in the “right” way to approach school improvement. In addition the School Portfolio process yields data, which allows educators to share with the patrons that school improvement is continuing in the right direction.

In this district the School Portfolio is seen as a “refreshing” way to facilitate school improvement. Principals, along with coordinators of other programs such as A+, School-to-Work and Americorps, meet weekly to discuss the portfolio process. The School Portfolio is seen as a good format for working with the various pieces for school improvement.

## Fort Osage R-I

Educators in the district began using the School Portfolio in October 2001. According to Sue Meyer, Cler-Mont Elementary principal, "It outlines a complete process from beginning to end." She says that the process complements the Missouri Accelerated Schools program, of which Cler-mont is a part, and aligns with the Missouri School Improvement Process in that it requires a vision and a mission. The use of data is another plus to the process.

In her Pre-K-4 building, Meyer has noticed a focus on identified needs by all educators and she notes that they are given ownership of the data analysis. She cites these two elements as early results achieved from the School Portfolio process.

Rather than changing the way Cler-Mont educators use data, the process has helped them refine their view of data, causing a deeper look and revealing "unsung, buried problems." The staff has begun to broaden its ideas about data and consider it on a "wide variety of planes."

The School Portfolio process has been modified to meet the needs at Cler-Mont Elementary. The process has been found to follow the Comprehensive School Reform model that has been completed by the building.

Although Meyer noted technology as an early barrier, she shared the aid is available when one navigates through the "helps" in technology.

All Fort Osage buildings have been given approval by the district to use the School Portfolio; not all begun the process although all have been encouraged. Those that have begun are at different levels and are moving in their own ways to meet their own needs. Meyer says that the process is adaptable and that there is "no wrong way" to implement it.

Although there are no expectations for completed portfolios this year, they likely will be completed next year. Meyer cites the process as one that should not be rushed, that people should take their time with it. She believes that "the journey and ownership count in getting there."

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